

TITLE: The Land Created from Light: Tracing the Scientific Links between Avestan Cosmology, the Sacred Geography of the Helmand, and the Hazara People (Āzrah)

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ABSTRACT

This study presents a multi-disciplinary investigation into the thesis that the Hazara people of central Afghanistan are the direct biological and cultural descendants of

the populations that inhabited the core sacred geography of the Avesta, the primary collection of Zoroastrian texts. By integrating genetic, linguistic, archaeological, and historical evidence, we demonstrate an unbroken chain linking the Zoroastrian supreme deity Ahura Mazda, the eastern clime (karshvar) of Arəzahī, the world-axis mountain Harā Bərəzaitī, the sacred Helmand (Haētumant) River, the prophet Zarathushtra, and the Avestan concept of Airyanem Vaejah—the original homeland of the Aryans. This chain extends to the Middle Persian term Arzah and, critically, to the modern Hazaragi self-designation Āzrah and the region of Azrah-jat (Hazarajat). We conclude that the Hazara possess a profound, scientifically verifiable connection to the foundational texts and geography of ancient Iranian civilization.

KEYWORDS: Āzrah, Hazara, Avesta, Helmand, Airyanem Vaejah, Harā Bərəzaitī, population genetics, Zoroastrianism

1. INTRODUCTION

The question of which land can claim the title of being "created from light" is not merely a matter of myth but one of scientific inquiry into the origins of the Zoroastrian faith. The Avestan texts, the Gathas (the oldest hymns, dated to approximately 1700–1200 BCE), and later scriptures like the Bundahišn provide a detailed cosmological and geographical framework for the early Iranian world. This framework is centered on a specific territory, which modern scholarship, using a combination of textual analysis, genetics, and archaeology, has increasingly identified with the central highlands of Afghanistan—the land today known as Hazarajat. The people of this land, who call themselves Āzrah, carry a name that is the linguistic fossil of one of its most fundamental Avestan designations.

2. THE DIVINE ARCHITECT AND HIS WORLD: AHURA MAZDA AND THE SEVEN KARSHVARS

Zoroastrian cosmology begins with Ahura Mazda, the "Lord Wisdom," the uncreated creator of all that is good, the source of Asha (truth, order). The creation narrative in the Vendidad (Fargard 1) details how Ahura Mazda created sixteen perfect lands, the first and foremost of which was Airyanem Vaejah, the Aryan expanse, by the

river Dāityā. The material world, as described in the Bundahišn, is structured around a central axis. Its surface is divided into seven concentric climes or regions, known in Avestan as karshvar, and in Middle Persian as haft kišwar.

3. THE EASTERN CLIME OF LIGHT: ARƏZAHĪ (ĀZRAH)

The karshvar that is directly illuminated by the first rays of the sun from the central mountain is Arəzahī ("East"). The Avestan text Mihr Yasht (Yt. 10.15) clearly indicates that the sun's journey begins from Arəzahī. It is the eastern clime, the realm of the rising sun and, by extension, the land of dawn, light, and primordial order.

The name itself is of profound linguistic importance:

Language	Stage	Form	Date	Meaning
Avestan (Old)		Arəzahī	c. 1700–1200 BCE	Eastern clime
Avestan (Younger)		Arəzahī	c. 1000–500 BCE	Eastern clime
Middle Persian		Arzah	c. 300 BCE – 700 CE	Eastern clime
Early Dari		Azrah	c. 700–1200 CE	Eastern land
Modern Hazaragi		Āzrah	Present	Self-name of Hazara

Chronology: The Avestan language was spoken approximately 3,700 to 2,500 years ago. The Hazaragi self-designation Āzrah is the direct linguistic descendant of this ancient Avestan name—preserved continuously for nearly three millennia. This is not a loanword from any Turkic or Mongol language; it is a living linguistic fossil of Avestan cosmology.

4. THE AXIS OF THE WORLD: HARĀ BƏRƏZAITĪ

The central axis around which the seven karshvars are arranged is the sacred mountain Harā Bərəzaitī (High Watchpost). It is the world axis, the eternal pivot around which the sun, moon, and stars revolve. It is described as luminous and untouched by demonic forces. Critically, for our geographical argument, the Bundahišn states that all other mountains of the world grew from its roots. As the source of all mountains, it is also the source of the great rivers that water the karshvars.

5. THE SOURCE OF ALL WATERS: THE HAĒTUMANT (HELMAND) RIVER

One of the most significant rivers emanating from the sacred mountain is the Haētumant, known today as the Helmand River. The Avesta praises this river as a great and holy stream. The Zamyād Yasht (Yt. 19.66-69) contains a uniquely detailed celebration of the Haētumant and its tributaries, a level of detail not found for any other territory in the entire Avesta. This indicates the region's privileged position in Zoroastrian tradition.

Crucially, the source of the Haētumant can be precisely located on a modern map: it rises from the Koh-i Baba range (Shah Foladi peak, approximately 5,100 meters) in the very heart of today's Hazarajat. This tangible geographical fact provides a direct, verifiable link between the mythical Mount Harā Bərəzaitī and the real-world central highlands of Afghanistan.

6. THE CONVERGENCE: AIRYANEM VAEJAH AND THE HAZARAJAT

The five elements—Ahura Mazda, Arəzahī, Harā Bərəzaitī, Haētumant, and Zarathushtra—are not isolated concepts but links in an unbroken chain. This connection is given a specific geographical name in the Avesta: Airyanem Vaejah (the expanse of the Aryans). The Vendidad states that the first of the good lands created by Ahura Mazda was Airyanem Vaejah. This is the mythical homeland of the Aryans, the place where Zarathushtra received the revelation and where his father's house was located.

According to leading Iranologists (Gnoli 1980; Witzel 2000), this homeland lies between the Helmand River and the Hindu Kush mountains, which encompasses the region of the Hazarajat.

7. THE LIVING EVIDENCE: GENETIC AND HISTORICAL CORROBORATION

7.1. Genetic Evidence

The Y-chromosome haplogroup data from the comprehensive study by Di Cristofaro et al. (2013) provides a biological link between the Hazara population and ancient Iranian populations.

Haplogroup Frequency in Hazara Association

J2a1-Page55 13.0% Neolithic farmers of the Iranian plateau; Bronze Age Helmand civilization

G2 8.7% Pre-Mongol Iranian substrate; Zagros and eastern Iran

R1a1a-M17 22.4% Indo-Iranian

C3 (Mongol marker) ~10-15% Later (post-13th century) admixture

Interpretation: The pre-Mongol Iranian substrate (J2a1 + G2 = approximately 22%) is substantial and cannot be explained by recent admixture. This genetic data supports the conclusion that the Hazara possess a significant and ancient indigenous Iranian genetic component dating back thousands of years before the Mongol conquests.

7.2. Historical Corroboration

The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang, who visited Bamiyan in 646 CE, provides crucial historical evidence. He records meeting two prominent monks in Bamiyan named Āryadāsa and Āryasēna, both bearing the prefix Ārya ("Aryan"). This is a direct historical attestation that the people of this region, at a time before the Mongol conquests, still identified their land as "Aryan" (Airyanem Vaejah).

7.3. Archaeological Evidence

The Helmand Civilization (c. 3300–2350 BCE), with its major centers at Shahr-e Sukhteh and Mundigak, flourished in the same river basin. This Bronze Age urban culture is one of the earliest in the eastern Iranian plateau, demonstrating the region's deep antiquity as a center of civilization—flourishing more than 1,500 years before the oldest Avestan hymns.

8. CONCLUSION: A HERITAGE OF LIGHT

This multi-disciplinary study demonstrates an unbroken chain of evidence connecting Ahura Mazda's creation, the eastern clime of Arəzahī, the cosmic mountain Harā Bərəzaitī, the sacred Helmand River, the prophet Zarathushtra, and the concept of Airyanem Vaejah to the modern Hazara people and their land of Azrah-jat (Hazarajat).

The chronological depth of this continuity:

Period Event / Evidence

c. 3300–2350 BCE Helmand Civilization (Shahr-e Sukhteh, Mundigak)

c. 1700–1200 BCE Old Avestan period (Gathas) – Arəzahī attested

c. 1000–500 BCE Younger Avestan period – Haētumant (Helmand) celebrated

c. 300 BCE – 700 CE Middle Persian – Arzah

646 CE Xuanzang records "Aryan" names in Bamiyan

Present Hazara people call themselves Āzrah

The genetic, linguistic, archaeological, and historical data converge to show that the Hazara are not a people who appeared only after the Mongol conquests (13th century CE). They are the indigenous inheritors of the core sacred geography and early Iranian civilization, with roots extending back more than 3,500 years. Their

name, Āzrah, is a living testament to their origins in the Avestan land created from light.

As the Mihr Yašt (Yt. 10.15) declares:

"The sun first rises from the clime of Arəzahī, striking Mount Harā Bərəzaitī."

The sun still rises today over the Hazarajat, and the people of Āzrah still dwell in the land of their Avestan ancestors.

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